

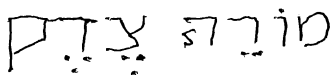
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THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF
QUMRAN'S TEACHER OF
RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE
PAULINE "RIGHTEOUSNESS OF
GOD"

Concordia Theological Seminary Press
Fort Wayne, Indiana



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A number of the Dead Seas Scrolls introduce us to an important personage and "player" in the history of the Essene sect,¹ many of whose members occupied the area of Qumran at some time, probably during the period from about the middle of the second century B.C. to 68 A.D. Never mentioned by his personal name in the Qumran texts, he is referred to as "The Teacher of Righteousness," the , whom scholars of the scrolls generally regard as the founder and/or principal religious leader of the Qumran sectarians (or, sectaries). He is presumed himself to have authored several of the Dead Sea documents and been the primary source of the religious teaching found in others. According to Qumranite belief, God had granted the teacher the revelation of all truth, finally and definitively.

This teacher led his followers to oppose contemporary political leaders' attempts to Hellenize Judaism; he brought them to accept an even stricter interpretation of the Mosaic law and maintain a severer discipline than even the Pharisees did. In so doing, the faithful were to consider themselves, according to the teacher's instruction, to be God's chosen, faithful remnant in Israel, indeed, the final remnant of all time—the true Israel of God with whom He had established a new covenant, the eternal blessing of which would be inaugurated with the arrival of a Messiah, or Messiahs, whose coming was imminent. The Messiah(s) would usher in a new age in which all wickedness would be banished from the world, truth and goodness would reign victoriously forever, the earth would be renovated, and the elect of God would inherit "a crown of glory, and a garment of majesty in unending light," as the Community Rule (IV)² puts it.

The teacher, who may also at first have been a priest involved in Jerusalem's temple

service, and his disciples encountered opposition and hostility from the Hasmonean³ rulers of their day and from others in Israelite society, scholars theorize. In due time they were forced, it seems, to leave the Jewish capital and, entering into what they called a “new covenant” with God, they settled and practiced their faith in the wilderness of Qumran. After the period of his ministry to his fellow sectarians, the teacher of righteousness died. His teachings lived on in the memories of Essenes at Qumran and elsewhere in Palestine and were perpetuated in many of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The precise dating of the years of the teacher’s ministry is debated. That question will not be treated in the body of this paper, except to say that it is generally held that the teacher lived and worked between about 175 and 63 B.C.⁴

Some students of the Dead Seas Scrolls have asserted that the apostle Paul was influenced in his theology by (even derived elements of it from) the literature of Qumran, including Paul’s central salvific concept of “the righteousness of God.” This paper proposes to examine specific passages in the scrolls containing the Qumran teacher’s instruction pertaining to the subject of the righteousness of God that is said to be divinely prescribed as saving for men (in God’s eyes) and to compare with this the significance of the concept of the saving “righteousness of God” as presented in the Pauline writings of the New Testament.

The Righteousness of Qumran’s Teacher of Righteousness

We may direct our attention first to the teacher’s comment in the Habakkuk Pesher⁵ at 24b, the well know passage, “The righteous shall live by his faith.” The comment reads: “Interpreted, this concerns all those who observe the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the

teacher of righteousness” (Vermes 239). Here it is stated that God will grant salvation to all who obey the law, faithfully adhere to the teacher’s person and his instruction (which centrally concerns law obedience), and endure suffering (evidently which fidelity to the teacher and law-obedience entails). What is spoken of here is righteousness by works. Paul in citing Habakkuk 2:4b (Rom. 1:17), we may note in passing, finds the prophet in the passage teaching something very different.

The teacher’s view of persons’ obtaining righteousness and salvation by adherence to the law is reflected also in this following passage (Vermes, 107-108) from the exhortation portion of the Damascus Rule produced at Qumran, copies of which were found at the end of the nineteenth century in an old Cairo synagog. ⁶

But all those who hold fast to these precepts, going and coming in accordance with the Law, who heed the voice of the Teacher and confess before God, (saying) “Truly we have sinned . . ., who do not lift their hand against His holy precepts or His righteous statutes or His true testimonies; ... who have listened to the voice of the Teacher of Righteousness and have not despised the precepts of righteousnessGod will forgive them and they shall see His salvation.”

Such is the substance of the basic instruction of the teacher of righteousness and belief of the community.

Yet featured in some of the scrolls are surprising statements which appear at first blush to countermand above indicated thoughts of human merit as constituting grounds for salvation. In these statements, human sinfulness and inability to effect self-rescue are emphasized, and appeals for divine salvific help are presented. Examples are offered, for instance, in the Hymns [Hodayoth] Scroll which contains numerous compositions of the teacher, and in some of which the teacher himself is speaking to God in the first person. Consider these words of Hymn II, 7

(Vermes 164) as the teacher says:

As for me, shaking and trembling seize me
 and all my bones are broken;
 my heart dissolves like wax before fire
 and my knees are like water
 pouring down a steep place.
 For I remember my sins
 and the unfaithfulness of my fathers.
 When the wicked rose against Thy Covenant
 and the damned against Thy word,
 I said in my sinfulness,
 'I am forsaken by Thy Covenant.'
 But calling to mind the might of Thy hand
 and the greatness of Thy compassion,
 I rose and stood,
 and my spirit was established
 in face of the scourge.

I lean on Thy grace
 and on the multitude of Thy mercies,
 for Thou wilt pardon iniquity,
 and through Thy righteousness
 [Thou wilt purify man] of his sin.
 Not for his sake wilt Thou do it,
 [but for the sake of Thy glory].

Again, VII, 11 (Vermes 174):

I have no fleshly refuge,
 [and Thy servant has] no righteous deeds
 to deliver him from the [Pit of no] forgiveness.
 But I lean on the [abundance of Thy mercies]
 and hope [for the greatness] of thy grace,
 that Thou wilt bring [salvation] to flower
 and the branch to growth,
 providing refuge in (Thy) strength
 [and raising up my heart].

[For in] Thy righteousness
 Thou hast appointed me for Thy Covenant,
 and I have clung to Thy truth
 and [gone forward in Thy ways].

Again, VII, 12 (Vermes, 175):

Yet Thou bringest all the sons of Thy truth
in forgiveness before Thee,
[to cleanse] them of their faults
through Thy great goodness,
and to establish them before Thee
through the multitude of thy mercies
for ever and ever.

Again, IX, 14 (Vermes, 180):

I delight in forgiveness,
and am consoled for the former transgression;
for I know there is hope in Thy grace
and expectation in Thy great power.
For no man can be just in Thy judgement
or [righteous in] Thy trial.

What about such language? What do assertions like these mean? Is a sinner, according to Qumran belief, saved by the forgiving grace of God alone, by an exhibition of divine compassion, apart from obedience to law? How can the gift of salvation also be attributed to God's righteousness, with righteousness here considered as a divine attribute? This, it should be noted, is a second usage of the term righteousness in a salvation context in the Qumran literature. God's inherent righteousness is regarded as saving, as the source of salvation.

The answer to these questions can be found in a careful consideration of what is said in the Hymns citations above and also in the following additional explanatory quotation from Hymn XVI, 22 (Vermes, 197). The author says:

And I know that man is not righteous
except through Thee,
and therefore I implore Thee
by the spirit which Thou has given [me]
to perfect Thy [favours] to Thy servant [for ever],
purifying me by Thy Holy Spirit,

and drawing me near to Thee by Thy grace
according to the abundance of Thy mercies.

...
[Grant me] the place [of Thy loving kindness]
which [Thou hast] chosen for them that love Thee
and keep [Thy commandments,
that they may stand] in Thy presence [for] ever.

The point is that the author of the Hymns sought from God, through his mercy and inherent righteousness and through his forgiveness, the spirit and power to obey the divine commandments and thus earn salvation. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor offers this helpful comment. The people of Qumran, he says,

were sure that God needed them to preserve his truth in the world; therefore, they believed that he would pardon them and save his remnant, not merely despite his justice [vindictive], but even because of his justice [or, righteousness] [salvific]. God's way of being truly just, which is to be faithful to his Covenant, would be to wipe away all their sins and save them by grace alone for love of his Name. This is the doctrine we find in the writings of the Teacher of Righteousness, who considers himself to be sent by God to re-establish the Covenant, and is certain that both he and his disciples have been chosen by God to be the sons of light, who are to conquer the sons of darkness; God, therefore, must, even by reason of his justice, pardon and purify them, and make them really holy (1QH 7: 19ff., 28-31).⁷

All that has been said in the citations above, represents what the teacher of righteousness taught about the righteousness of God which saves. Whether, according to context, that phrase was seen to designate (a) the righteousness of life God demands in his law for the attainment of salvation or (b) his righteousness as attribute, which moved him to various salvific activities in behalf of his covenant people, this teaching differs completely from Paul's instruction regarding the saving "righteousness of God." To the latter we shall next proceed. It should be noted at this point that none of the Qumran instruction included any reference to the Messiah, Jesus Christ,

and his sin-atonement sacrifice as necessary to enable God to act salvifically in behalf of men. Nor did the instruction concerning believing in the teacher of righteousness signify anything more than having faith in his teaching. It did not refer to believing in the person of Jesus; his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, or return in glory; and to the necessity of trusting in Him as living redeeming Lord in order to be saved. The same observations can be made with regard to the rest of the Qumran literature: there is no mention of Christ and the way of salvation opened by a gracious God to believers in Jesus and his redemptive work.

The Pauline "Righteousness of God"

The exact phrase "Righteousness of God," *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*—to which the present writer confines his ensuing remarks—occurs in two of Paul's New Testament epistles, Romans and 2 Corinthians, and is the theme of his great systematic, doctrinal letter, the Epistle to the Romans. Paul uses the phrase to designate the divinely provided mediatorial grounds of the sinner's salvation. It is the righteousness of God which saves. References to this righteousness, in abbreviation, simply with the words "His righteousness" or simply "righteousness," appear in various contexts in five additional Pauline epistles, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and 2 Timothy.

Paul writes in the theme of Romans, 1:16-17, these well known words (translation, mine):

I am not ashamed of the Gospel,
for it is the power of God for
salvation in the case of everyone
who believes, the Jew first and
also the Greek. For in connection
with it the righteousness of God
is being revealed from faith for

faith, even as it is written “The
righteous one, out of his faith
will he go on living.

Prior to these verses Paul states that he is eager to travel to Rome and continue there his proclamation of the truth. Far from being reticent about this, as the result of unease over the matter of Gospel preaching in the capital city of the empire, Paul has been “champing at the bit” as it were to do so, he indicates, because operative in the Gospel whenever and wherever it is communicated is God’s own mighty power to save hearers, of all strata of society, by bringing them to faith in the Gospel and the Savior Jesus Christ whom it exalts. This power of God is operative to create saving faith, when—in connection with the Gospel’s very proclamation—the righteousness of God is miraculously revealed to the hearer in a dynamic and effective manner so that he understands it, is immediately brought by the Holy Spirit to accept it as his own and cling to it thereafter in faith relentlessly for his everlasting life and salvation. The apostle adds that what he says is really nothing absolutely strange and new to the people of God, for the righteousness, faith, and life of which he speaks has already been referred to in the Old Testament by a prophet like Habakkuk in his inspired proclamation centuries before Paul’s time. Israelites and others in the Old Testament period, believing this and other Gospel promises (all having to do ultimately with the coming Messiah-Redeemer), were saved by God, Paul implies, just as the church in his day was. Faith in the good news centering in Christ brings righteousness, life and salvation to sinners in every age.

What, then, is the righteousness of God, the faith-creating revelation of which to the sinner starts the whole process of personal salvation as far as he is concerned? On the basis of all that Paul writes on this subject, the following may be said. In Romans 1:17 and other passages in

which this righteousness is presented as salvific, the phrase cannot refer (1) to God's essential righteousness, his attribute of righteousness, since that attribute needs no special revelation; it is part of man's natural knowledge concerning the deity. And add this consideration: if God were to deal with sinners strictly in accord with his inherent righteousness alone, He could only damn them for their transgressions, withhold salvation from them.

Nor could the phrase refer (2) to a righteousness produced by man and presented to God in order to receive the divine award of salvation, for the saving righteousness in the Romans passage is first something which is outside of man and comes to be his own exclusively through faith. Add to this the consideration that the entire Epistle to the Romans, as does Galatians and do other Pauline letters, inveighs against the deceptive notion that a man by his own works, by his (presumed) obedience to God's law, is able to generate a righteousness which God could accept and reward with salvation.

The saving righteousness is rather a righteousness "from God," *ἐκ Θεοῦ*, as Paul puts it in Philippians 3:9. The genitive *Θεοῦ* in the phrase *δικαιοσύνη Θεοῦ* is a genitive of origin (or author, or source); the righteousness is originated and prepared by God, namely, through Christ. The saving righteousness may be described as consisting in the sum total of Christ's merits, that is, his entire vicarious, active and passive obedience to his Heavenly Father, as throughout his earthly life he perfectly kept the divine law in all men's stead and then suffered and died to atone for the sins of all mankind, enduring in Himself, in the stead of the human race, the divine wrath against the whole of humanity and human iniquity, and satisfying the divine justice. Thus, this saving righteous may be denominated Christ's "obedience-wrought righteousness" as Mediator, Mediator between God and men.

This obedience-wrought righteousness, according to Pauline teaching, is available “in Christ,” through the grace, that is, the undeserved kindness and favor of God, for imputation to sinful man, via the sinner’s apprehension of Christ through faith. The Gospel reveals and offers this righteousness to sinners, and works faith in their hearts to accept it. A believing sinner’s faith embraces Christ and brings Christ to the sinner; and Christ brings to, and bestows upon, the sinner his (Christ’s) obedience-wrought righteousness as Mediator. He invests him, as it were with a “robe of righteousness” (to employ words from Isaiah 61:10). This salvific action occurs according to the provision and by the divine imputation of God the Father. This means that the Father graciously charges Christ’s obedience-wrought righteousness to the account of the believer. In words that say the same thing, God accounts the believer righteous for Christ’s sake, justifies him, declares him righteous. A forensic (declarative) action takes place: God does not make the sinner righteous, transform him into a perfect, sinless being, but declares and accounts him righteous. Thus accounted righteous, the believer has immediately bestowed upon him the blessings of union with Christ and, indeed, with the Triune God, fellowship with God, eternal life, and the other gifts of present salvation –these in anticipation of the gifts of continued salvation with its unspeakable glories in heaven through all eternity. In actuality, the divine justifying action occurs “in Christ” (compare 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:17; Philippians 3:9; 1 Corinthians 1:30; and Romans 4:3) the moment union with Christ is established through faith.

The Lutheran Confessions offer a fine summarizing explanation of the Pauline “righteousness of God” in the words of the Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, Article III, which is entitled “The Righteousness of Faith before God,” sections 9-17, that read:

Concerning the righteousness of faith before God we believe, teach, and confess unanimously, in accord with the summary formulation of our Christian faith and confession described above, that a poor sinner is justified before God [that is, he is absolved and declared utterly free from all his sins, and from the verdict of well deserved damnation, and is adopted as a child of God and an heir of eternal life] without any merit or worthiness on our part, and without any preceding, present, or subsequent works, by sheer grace, solely through the merit of the total obedience, the bitter passion, the death, and the resurrection of Christ, our Lord, whose obedience is reckoned to us as righteousness. The Holy Spirit offers these treasures to us in the promise of the Gospel, and faith is the only means whereby we can apprehend, accept, apply them to ourselves, and make them our own. Faith is a gift of God whereby we rightly learn to know Christ as our redeemer in the Word of the Gospel and to trust in him, that solely for the sake of his obedience we have forgiveness of sins by grace, are accounted righteous and holy by God the Father, and are saved forever. Thus the following statements of St. Paul are to be considered and taken as synonymous: “We are justified by faith” (Rom. 3:28), or “faith is reckoned to us as righteousness”: (Rom. 4:5), or when he says that we are justified by the obedience of Christ, our only mediator, or that “one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men” (Rom. 5:18). For faith does not justify because it is so good a work and so God-pleasing a virtue, but because it lays hold on and accepts the merit of Christ in the promise of the holy Gospel. This merit has to be applied to us and to be made our own through faith if we are to be justified thereby. Therefore the righteousness which by grace is reckoned to faith or to the believers is the obedience, the passion, and the resurrection of Christ when he satisfied the law for us and paid for our sin. Since Christ is not only man, but God and man in one undivided person, he was as little under the law—since he is the Lord of the law—as he was obligated to suffer and die for his person. Therefore his obedience consists not only in his suffering and dying, but also in his spontaneous subjection to the law in our stead and his keeping of the law in so perfect a fashion that, reckoning it to us as righteousness, God forgives us our sins, accounts us holy and righteous, and saves us forever on account of this entire

obedience which, by doing and suffering, in life and in death, Christ rendered for us to his heavenly Father. This righteousness is offered to us by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel and in the sacraments, and is applied, appropriated, and accepted by faith, so that thus believers have reconciliation with God, forgiveness of sins, the grace of God, adoption, and the inheritance of eternal life.

Accordingly the word “justify” here means to declare righteous and free from sins and from the eternal punishment of these sins on account of the righteousness of Christ which God reckons to faith (Phil. 3:9). And this is the usual usage and meaning of the word in the Holy Scriptures of the Old and the New Testaments.⁸

Summary

A study of the Qumran teacher’s righteousness referred to as saving sinful human beings and a comparison of this with the Pauline saving “righteousness of God,” reveals the stark difference in the two righteousness-concepts. The teacher’s is chiefly a righteousness consisting in good works, works done in obedience to God’s law as explained by the teacher, works produced by human effort; Paul’s is a righteousness which is totally a gift of God to sinners, who are unable to offer God any good works; a righteousness consisting in the merits of Jesus Christ, that is, his active and passive obedience imputed to sinners who believe in Him as living Redeemer and Lord. The teacher’s is a righteousness which a sinner will completely acquire, and which will then qualify him to receive the reward of a glorious salvation, only at the end of the age of human history; Paul’s is an imputed righteousness which a believing sinner obtains instantaneously and entirely the moment he is brought to faith; a righteousness which brings with it many blessings of salvation in the present life as well as in the life to come. The teacher’s is a righteousness which only the elect taught at Qumran can possibly obtain; Paul’s is a

righteousness available to all people of the world and universally and transgenerationally obtainable by all who believe in Jesus.

The teacher also in various passages of the scrolls speaks of the inherent righteousness of God, the divine attribute of righteousness, as saving, inasmuch as the teacher sees this righteousness as compelling God in fidelity to the covenant-relationship He established with his chosen people, and apart from any other consideration, to empower them to obey the divine law and perform the good works which earn them salvation. Paul knows only of an inherent righteousness of God which has been offended by human iniquity and compels him to punish sinners; but the apostle also knows of a love of God for mankind which led Him to satisfy his own inherent righteousness and justice via the substitutionary sacrifice of his Son, and thus open the way of salvation to all sinners.

Was the apostle Paul, then, influenced in his theology concerning the righteousness through which people may obtain salvation, by the instruction of Qumran's teacher of righteousness in this matter? The answer is a decided and definite No. Both leaders had access to and used the Old Testament as a foundation for the faith each taught. Paul, under God and after his conversion, found in this Scripture the doctrine of a saving righteousness in Christ and continued to proclaim this Gospel at the dawn of the New Testament era. The teacher did not discover that righteousness in the Old Testament and promulgated a contrasting doctrine of righteousness and salvation through human effort and merit.

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January 19, 1994

ENDNOTES

1. Cf. Matthew Black's discussion of the identification of the Qumranites with members of the Jewish Essene Party in his *The Essene Problem* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons, 1961)—an identification with which most scholars of the Scrolls are in agreement.

2. G. Vermes *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore: Penquin Books, Inc. 1962), p. 76. Vermes, p. 71, describes the Community Rule as follows: "The Community Rule is probably one of the oldest documents of the sect; its original composition may date from the latter part of the second century B.C. It seems to have been intended for the Community's teachers, for its Masters or Guardians, and contains extracts from liturgical ceremonies, an outline of a model sermon . . . , statutes concerned with initiation into the sect and with its common life, organization and discipline, a penal code, and finally a poetic dissertation on the fundamental religious duties of the Master and his disciples, and on the sacred seasons proper to the Community."

Section One of the Rule begins with the words, p. 72: "[The Master shall teach the sai]nts to live [according to] the Book of the Community Rule, that they may seek God with a whole heart and soul, and do what is good and right before Him as He commanded by the hand of Moses and all his servants the Prophets; that they may love all that He has chosen and hate all that He has rejected; that they may abstain from all evil and hold fast to all good; that they may practice truth, righteousness, and justice upon earth. . . . He shall admit into the Covenant of Grace all those who have freely devoted themselves to the observance of God's precepts."

In the present paper, the translations of selected passages from the literature of the Scrolls are throughout those of Vermes. The source of each of the further Scroll-quotations will be indicated in the text of the paper with the designation, in parentheses, "Vermes" and the page number(s) following; thus, e.g. (Vermes, 72).

3. The designation "Hasmonean" refers to the family name applied to the dynasty of Jewish high priests and kings who ruled in Palestine from 142 to 63 B.C., the time of Israel's independence, between the periods of Greek and Roman overlordship. The earliest family members have also been denominated "the Maccabees."

4. Vermes offers this summary commentary, p. 57f.: Relative to "the persons, events, and dates which the experts have had to bear in mind when assessing the origins of the sect and, more particularly, the time of the ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness," they have principally "tended to advance three theories. The first, supported by H.H. Rowley, I. Rabinowitz, H. Bardtke, M. Black, and others, recognizes that the occurrences alluded to in the Scrolls took place in the era of the Hellenistic crisis, i.e., during the reigns of Antiochus Epiphanes and Demetrius I (c. 175-160 B.C.). The second is the Maccabean theory [c. 155-134 B.C.] proposed by the present writer and adopted with certain modifications by J.T. Milik, F.M. Cross, P. Winter, E.F. Sutcliffe, R. de Vaux, G. Jeremias, etc.; this identifies the Wicked Priest with Jonathan and/or Simon. The third theory inclines to, the priod of the Hasmoneans (134-40 B.C.), with marked preference for the reign of either Alexander Jannaeus (M. Delcor, H.M. Segal, J.M. Allegro, F.F. Bruce, and others) or Hyrcanus II (A. Dupont-Sommer, K. Elliger).

“Whichever of these three periods is adopted, and each holds some degree of probability, the life and ministry of the Teacher of Righteousness will fall between the years 175 and 63 B.C.”

F.F. Bruce in his *The Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran Texts* (London: Tyndale Press, 1957) refers to various attempts scholars have made to identify the teacher of righteousness with some person or other mentioned elsewhere in Jewish literature. Some of these suggested identifications he discusses on pages 28-29, after giving his own reasoned surmise.

5. The Habakkuk Peshier is one of the Peshierim (plural), the commentaries on the Bible found at Qumran which present the Hebrew texts of the prophets and other books of the Old Testament written phrase by phrase, with each text followed by an explanation of its meaning and an application to the history of the sectarians of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Habakkuk Peshier throws considerable light on the sect's history.

6. Vermes offers these clarifying comments, pages 95-96: “Extensive fragments of the Damascus Rule have been recovered from three of the Qumran caves, but two incomplete medieval copies of this document had been found already many years earlier, in 1896–7, amongst a mass of discarded manuscripts in a store-room (*geniza*) of an old Cairo synagog.” From these copies Vermes develops his translation. He suggests that the Rule was written about 100 B.C. and points out that this work is divided into an Exhortation and a list of Statutes. “In the Exhortation, the preacher—probably a Guardian of the Community—addresses his ‘sons’ on the themes of the sect’s teaching His aim is to encourage the sectaries to remain faithful, and with this end in view he sets out to demonstrate from the history of Israel and the Community that fidelity is always rewarded and apostasy chastised.”

7. Murphy-O’Connor, Jerome, editor, *Paul and Qumran: Studies in New Testament Exegesis* (Chicago: The Priory press, 1968), p. 26.

8. Tappert, Theodore G., translator and editor, *The Book of Concord* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), pp. 540-542.